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Globalization and interdependence: international migration and development

Letter dated 13 April 2006 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Belgium to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the pleasure of transmitting to you the final conclusions of the International Conference on Migration and Development, held in Brussels on 15 and 16 March 2006 (see annex). The Conference was organized by the Kingdom of Belgium and the International Organization for Migration, with the support of the World Bank and the European Commission.

The Conference brought together some 400 participants — including several Ministers and other high-ranking officials — from migrant receiving countries and emigration countries alike, as well as representatives of international organizations, diaspora associations, think tanks and other civil society organizations involved in migration and/or development activities.

The attached conclusions summarize the key issues and outcomes of the Conference, and I believe that they can offer a useful contribution to the High-level Dialogue on International Migration and Development, to be held at the United Nations in September 2006. I would very much appreciate if you could circulate the conclusions to all Member States and observers to the General Assembly for information, under item 54 (b) of the preliminary list.

(*Signed*) **Alain Cools**
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* A/61/50 and Corr.1.

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Migration and Development Conference
Palais d'Egmont, Brussels

15 and 16 March 2006

Conference Conclusions

These conclusions summarize the key issues and outcomes of the conference on Migration and Development organized by the Government of the Kingdom of Belgium and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), with support from the World Bank and the European Commission (EC), in Brussels on 15-16 March 2006. The conference brought together government representatives from migrant-receiving countries in Europe and countries of origin in Africa, Asia and Latin America, as well as international organizations, migrant organizations and other civil society organizations involved with migration and/or development.

The purpose of the conference was to discuss how migration and related policies can contribute to economic development in countries of origin or transit, and how development policies in turn can address root causes of migration such as poverty and lack of socio-economic prospects, and ease the pressures on people to emigrate unwillingly. The conference and its conclusions would offer a useful contribution to the High-Level Dialogue on International Migration and Development planned for the UN General Assembly in September 2006.

1. Migration and Development

a) Participants agreed that in the context of globalization there has been an important change in perceptions about migration and development. Following a key orientation of the European Commission's Communication on Migration and Development in 2005, migration today is widely recognized as a social, economic and political phenomenon in a broader dialogue involving different ministries in countries of origin, transit and destination, international organizations and civil society. The conference was an excellent example of this broader multidisciplinary approach.

b) Demographic and economic imbalances will continue to fuel migration, which can have both positive and negative consequences. But the conference recognized that migration has the potential to foster economic growth and human capital improvements for both receiving countries and countries of origin.

c) Actions in support of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) can address some of the structural causes of migration, and migration can positively influence the achievement of the MDGs. Migration is a multidimensional phenomenon, affecting and being affected by, other areas of public policy such as education, labour, trade, gender, health and security. World Bank and other evidence shows that there are potential benefits for poverty reduction and development through the increased income potential of poor families with members abroad, but that these benefits, among others, depend on the policies of governments at both origin and destination ends.

d) There was a strong call for multidisciplinary approaches, for inclusion of migration into development and poverty reduction strategies at national, regional and international levels, and for institutional and consultative mechanisms to facilitate interdisciplinary approaches.

2. Migration Policies and Development: how to achieve greater coherence of migration and development policies

e) There was a repeated call for coherence of policies and institutional actions at local, national, regional and international levels, to ensure the widest mutual benefits of migration and development. Coherence begins at home, stated several speakers, and examples were given of how ministries and governments were today working together more closely on the two issues (e.g. the Belgian Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Development and Interior jointly organizing this conference, or the common policy document prepared by the Ministry of Justice and Migration and the Ministry of Development Cooperation in the Netherlands). Migration and development are already on the agenda of the EU Council of Ministers, including the Foreign Affairs and Development Council, which will address these issues at its next session.

f) The conference suggested that temporary, circular forms of labour migration, which protect the migrant, offer incentives for return, and provide some flexible residence and citizenship options are more likely to benefit all concerned. Demographic pressures are creating a need for regulated labour migration programs to Europe, which can also bring sustainable benefits to the countries of origin.

g) Coherent approaches to migration and development should also consider the broader structural causes of migration, in particular the lack of economic growth and gainful employment opportunities in developing countries, sometimes aggravated by trade and agricultural policies of industrialized countries. It was stressed that the primary responsibility for creating the conditions conducive to development lies with each country. It was also recalled that refugees and forced migrants can play an essential role in reconstruction and peace-building efforts essential for sustainable development.

h) There was a general recognition of the urgent need for more data on migration and related aspects (net flows, gender dimensions, migration policies, remittances etc), and for systematic analysis and evaluations of their impacts on development, as well as of the impacts of development on migration, so as to better inform policies on migration and development.

i) There were calls for enhanced inter-agency collaboration to pool the expertise of the many international agencies engaged with migration and development in support of the policy efforts of governments. There were also calls for creating a voluntary mechanism for private and public sector investment in human resource development and more effectively matching labour supply and demand.

3 Partnership among Countries of Origin, Transit and Destination

j) Partnerships among countries mutually concerned with migration were recognized as an important alternative to unilateral, exclusively enforcement-oriented approaches. These can help balance the interests of developing countries in retaining, or recovering, their essential skilled resources, and those of developed countries in meeting urgent labour shortages. In Asia, the conferences of labour ministers – the "Colombo Process" supported by IOM – provided a useful example of how labour sending and receiving countries can share experiences and plan future cooperation.

k) There was a call, particularly by African countries of origin and transit for international cooperation, technical assistance and capacity building in managing their borders, tackling irregular migration, particularly trafficking of persons, and creating a conducive financial and investment climate for economic growth, entrepreneurship and productive remittance use by poor families. In this context south-south cooperation is of particular importance. Regional development strategies are in many cases strong catalysts for greater prosperity and economic development. At the same time, there was interest in studying existing bilateral labour migration programs, and the carefully planned labour emigration strategies of countries such as the Philippines, India and Sri Lanka, as well as some comprehensive labour immigration programs such as those offered by Canada.

4. Migrant Communities and Development

l) Both countries of destination and origin – Belgium, France, Netherlands, Portugal, Morocco and the Philippines – highlighted the huge potential of migrant communities in contributing to development of their home countries. One well-tried and documented model for involving migrant communities and the business sector in joint development activities in origin countries was the co-development strategy of the French Government in countries like Mali, Morocco, Tunisia, Cambodia or Vietnam. Also the Belgian non-profit organization, BIO provides assistance through micro-credits and loans to small and medium enterprises in an unbound manner and offers great potential for support to entrepreneurs. The chances of success of these schemes will be maximized if the projects are embedded in larger socio-economic development programs. The IOM's Migration for Development in Africa programme (MIDA) funded by the Belgian Government and supported by the President of the Belgian Senate, is a promising example of European efforts to mobilize diaspora knowledge, skills and resources for key development sectors such as health, agriculture, education, etc.

m) Portugal stressed the importance of effective integration of migrants in host countries to empower them as productive "human bridges" between home and host countries. Respect for the human rights of migrants, especially the most vulnerable, is part of this empowerment.

n) The systematic investment in the managed mobility of foreign workers by the Philippines Government offered other countries an important model for preparing, supporting and protecting citizens abroad, whose labour helped sustain development efforts at home.

o) The World Bank's *Global Economic Prospects 2006* report has shown that migrant remittances today are a powerful driver of economic development, often well beyond the contribution of ODA and foreign direct investment. All participants recognized, however, that remittances are private funds and should not be dealt with as public resources. Nonetheless, specific government policies can create appropriate financial environments to lower costs and risks to the migrants, and encourage further transfers and productive use of the remittances. Diaspora banks and microfinance institutions have a critical role to play in that endeavour.

p) Investment in human resource development was seen by participants as an indispensable complement to these innovative financial and skills transfer strategies.

5. Promoting Migrants' Contribution to the Development of their Home Country

q) Educated and skilled persons are a precious development resource for many poor countries, and their departure through migration, particularly for small, fragile developing economies, can represent a loss for innovation, mentoring and development of new skills, and deplete sectors critical for growth and development. Programs like IOM's MIDA, UNDP's TOKTEN, or other diaspora initiatives such as FORIM in France (Forum des organisations de solidarite internationales issues des Migrations) help both to channel migrant skills back to the home country and to permit sharing of those skills between home and host countries. A stronger commitment was needed by origin countries to provide enabling environments for such trans-national skills and knowledge sharing.

r) More joint action was needed to develop structures for international sharing of knowledge and experience to the mutual benefit of origin and destination countries. These should be based on evaluations of existing programs and policies linking migration and development. Indeed, this was an overriding message of the conference, namely to examine current good practices and evaluate their usefulness as models for future coherent approaches on migration and development, and to share them widely.

s) The website of this conference is offered as a means of broadening and deepening the dissemination of innovative approaches to migration and development.

t) Conference participants request that these conclusions be brought to the attention of the High-Level Dialogue on International Migration and Development planned for the UN General Assembly in September 2006 and call for governments to take full consideration of these conclusions in preparation of the event.